
A HISTORY OF ROSE COTTAGE



Otterbein Home
1982

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Compiled and written

by

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1811-1982

When Rose Cottage is taken down, the building will exist no more, but memories of it, and the life it once held, always will be a part of the history of Ohio, of the Shakers who built it in 1811, and of Otterbein Home since its founding in 1913.

Over the years the building has deteriorated so much as to make its restoration prohibitively expensive. The Board of Trustees of Otterbein Home sought for years to find some way to preserve the building. They always have felt however, that funds for the care of residents should be devoted to the purpose for which they were contributed. Since no surplus ever has been available, and no outside source has been found, restoration could not be undertaken.

Some doors, flooring and woodwork will be given to the Warren County Historical Society, to be built into an addition to the present museum in Lebanon. Identity of these items will be preserved.

In February 1968 the Board of Trustees decided that the building should be razed that summer. Charles K. Dilgard, administrator of Otterbein Home, wrote Ohio Governor Rhodes, who referred him to the Ohio Historical Society. After inspection, the Society stated that cost of restoration would be more than their funds would permit.

A determining factor in this decision was the fact that the building had been changed a great deal both inside and outside, so that it no longer represented original, distinctive Shaker architecture. However, in March 1968 the Ohio Historical Society offered to pay for outside painting, in the hope that this would give the building a little more life.

Then in April 1968 A. Donald Emerich and Arlen H. Benning of Pittsfield, Massachusetts, came unannounced to Otterbein Home, along with Glenn Thompson, editor of the Dayton Journal Herald, and Daniel Porter, director of the Ohio Historical Society. Mr. Emerick was a member of the Advisory Council of Hancock Shaker Village (Museum) Pittsfield, and co-chairman of the Shaker Studies Conference. Mr. Benning was secretary of the Shaker Studies Conference.

They stated that Rose Cottage was the most significant structure of authentic Shaker construction in the state of Ohio. From it, the whole Shaker missionary effort was directed. New settlements at Watervliet (Dayton), White Water (Hamilton) North Union, (Shakertown, Cleveland) and several places in Indiana, had been formed as a result of missionary efforts directed from this building at Union Village. The visitors were able to pinpoint the parts of Rose Cottage that were of genuinely Shaker origin.

This information was of great interest and importance to the Ohio Historical Society. Mrs. Hazel Spencer Phillips, widely known Ohio historian (who came to live at Otterbein some years later) was present at the 1968 meeting with Mr. Emerick and Mr. Benning, as was this writer.

The Committee for the Restoration of the Shakers' Union Village was formed about 1972-'73. A brochure stated that "The immediate concern of the committee is restoration of the Elders' Shop. * * * Mr. Robert F.W. Meador, Director of the Shaker Museum in Old Chatham, N.Y., examined the structure in November 1972 and was impressed with the construction and its possibilities for restoration." Membership of \$2.00 was solicited, contributions to be mailed to the Committee for Restoration, c/o Rev. Marvin Leist, Otterbein Home. Rev. Leist was pastor of the Otterbein Home U.M. Church from July 1972 to June 1974. This effort proved ineffective, as only

\$78 was received. This has been carried on Otter-bein Home's books ever since.

Mrs. Phillips, in her book Shaker Architecture stated that the Shakers began digging the cellar (of the Elders' Shop) on September 14, 1811, began to lay brick on October 7, and finished the building November 23.

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At first the building was called the Elders' Shop. Chairs, spinning wheels and reels were made there. A printing press was installed and used to print Shaker publications. It was the apothecary shop, and the Shaker postoffice.

The postoffice was discontinued when rural free delivery was begun. After that it was a carpenter and paint shop. But it was known, as late as 1915, as "the old Shaker postoffice."

Dr. J.M. Phillippi, at the time he was trying to interest United Brethren in purchase of Union Village, wrote a small book Shakerism. Dr. Phillippi had spent considerable time at Union Village, looking over the buildings and farms, and talking with the Shakers remaining there. He makes reference in connection with a picture to "The residence, afterward used as a postoffice, built in 1811."

All Shaker communities were organized and managed by the parent colony in New Lebanon, New York. Authorities there appointed elders and eldresses to direct the spiritual life, and oversee the activities of the various "families." They directed production of food, farm crops, clothing and industries. It seems likely that the building became known as "the Elders' Shop" because elders worked and lived there.

When all the Shakers moved out, they left some beds in the Elders' House. These were discovered by hoboes, who found it a good place to spend a night or two. Word spread among them, and for a time the building was known as "tramp house." The itinerants also discovered that a good meal always could be had at "the big brick" (now called Bethany) where the dining room was located. They never were refused food.

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After Otterbein Home was established in 1913, the Elders' Shop stood idle until 1915, when the Board of Trustees reached a firm decision to remodel it as a home for children of missionaries. Dr. and Mrs. J.R. King, superintendent and matron, had felt from the beginning that it was an important function of Otterbein to provide Christian environment and educational opportunity for children who must be left behind when their missionary parents returned to the foreign field.

Pictures taken about that time show a plain gable roof over a structure that appears to be constructed of bricks about the size of present-day concrete blocks. These blocks can be seen in a picture of the audience at the dedication ceremony, which was held out of doors. Mr. Emerick and Mr. Benning also spoke of the bricks, which had been covered in later years with stucco. The original pictures, however, show the outer wall almost completely hidden by thick vines, giving the building an appearance of great age. It was then 106 years old.

During preparation for its use as a home for missionary children, noticeable changes were made. Dormer windows were set into the roof, and a frame extension 16 x 16 feet, two stories, with porch was added. Cost of remodeling, and the addition, was reported as about \$3,000. In a report to General

Conference for the quadrennium ending March 21, 1917, note is made that "this addition includes two rooms, making a good building of 10 rooms, with furnace, bath, sanitary plumbing, and all other features to make it modern." As a matter of fact, the addition was two-story.

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Bishop A.T. Howard, bishop of Foreign Fields, and Secretary S.S. Hough, participated in the dedication July 4, 1917, Bishop Howard making the principal address.

Four children of Rev. and Mrs. H.W. Widdoes, stationed in the Phillipines, came in January 1918. Mr. and Mrs. H.T. Miller were house parents. Mrs. Miller, who had been boys' governess, continued to help with sewing and in other capacities about Otterbein Home. Since all of the rooms in the new Home for Missionary Children were not needed at the time, ten girls from the Childrens' Home (now Bethany) studied and slept there.

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Need for more room for older girls became acute. In 1918 an unused farm house was moved from the south farm to the west end of the open space between the "Shaker building" (Marble Hall) and "the big brick" (Bethany). Cost of moving and remodeling was almost \$4,000. This became known as the Girls' Annex. No formal dedication service was held. That building stood there until the late 1950's.

From time to time changes were made in the grouping and location of girls, the Missionary Home being in constant use for one age group or another. Apparently the original purpose as a home for children of missionaries never met expectations of

the planners, as to numbers, so that available space was used for girls from the general population of the Home.

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As the years went on, mention was made in reports of the need for repairs and improvements to the various buildings on campus, the Home for Missionary Children included. One report especially made mention of damage by termites.

In a report of April 26, 1926, the building is mentioned as "overflow" sleeping quarters for girls, "the building proper being residence of the school principal." Rev. and Mrs. J.P. Hendrix lived there when Rev. Hendrix was the first conference-appointed pastor of Otterbein Home Church, and principal of the school, 1920-23. Other school principal-ministers lived there as the population of children increased.

It was at a meeting of the Board of Trustees, June 30, 1926, that the superintendent of Otterbein Home, A.R. Brane, requested the privilege of changing the larger girls from the Girls' Annex to the Mission Home, and setting this Home among roses. He asked that it then be called Rose Lawn. The request was granted.

In later reports the building is referred to as Rose Cottage, the change probably having come about informally in everyday conversation. Mrs. Mabel Sheneman, matron from 1955-1962, mentions "lots of flowers, climbing roses and other flowers all around the house." See her story appended to this report.

In June 1963 all children who were wards of the Home left Otterbein Home. The youth population had dwindled and new applications were few, due to the new government assistant programs for families.

In January 1962 a new matron was needed for Marble Hall, where elderly residents were housed. Mrs. Sheneman transferred. She served there until she retired.

Mr. and Mrs. Robert Ragle came from Indiana December 27, 1962. Mrs. Ragle was interim matron in Rose Cottage, between the time Mrs. Sheneman moved and June 1963, when all children who were wards of Otterbein returned to their families or went to Flat Rock Childrens' Home. Mr. Ragle worked with Maintenance staff. After the children left, Mr. and Mrs. Ragle moved to a cottage on Clippinger Street, north of Phillippi. They moved once more before moving to the cottage at corner of St. Rt. 741 and Circle Drive, where they have lived for 11 years (as of 1980).

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Rose Cottage was vacant until the Dwight Williams family moved in August 1963. Mr. Williams was assistant to Miss Mary McKenzie, Otterbein Home Treasurer. The Williams' had several children. In 1968 they moved to the former parsonage across from Bethany-Phillippi, living there until May 1968 when they moved back to Columbus.

Rose Cottage was empty for some time. Then Mr. and Mrs. Don Ramsey and their children moved in 1972, remaining there until 1976 when they moved to their newly constructed home in Lebanon. Mr. Ramsey had been employed by the contractor who build the duplexes in the first "village"--Apple-Redbud Courts. After that had been completed he became part of the Otterbein staff, as head of Construction-Maintenance. Mrs. Ramsey worked for some time as secretary in the clinic in Heritage Lobby and Newcomer, but afterward took another job off campus.

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During residence in Rose Cottage Mr. Ramsey observed condition of the building from the standpoint of his experience in construction. Floors had sagged precariously, but had been shored up by heavy posts. John Dilgard, father of Administrator Dilgard, who had come to live on campus, directed that work about 1967. Main beams had been seriously damaged by termites. The foundation of bricks and some rocks was in less than good condition.

Rose Cottage does not represent the best of Shaker workmanship, Mr. Ramsey believes. A replica would cost less to build than would restoration of the old building.

Rose Cottage was again a residence when the family of Ron Jones, an Otterbein employee, lived there November 1976 to February 1977. It was occupied by another employee, Charles Muller, from June to August 1977. Both of these employees needed only temporary quarters at the time.

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During construction, 1979-80, of a new building that enclosed the older laundry building, and also provides shop space and a greenhouse, "The Woodshed" was moved to Rose Cottage. There hobbyists carried on production of hand-crafted items for which they have achieved considerable recognition. "The Woodshed" was moved to the new building in 1979.

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Rose Cottage, the structure, may go out of existence, but its contribution to Shaker enterprise and Otterbein history will remain for generations to come.

APPENDIX

Mrs. Sheneman's Story

I arrived at Otterbein Home in July 1955 to be house mother to 14 intermediate girls, and to live in Rose Cottage.

The center hall was wide, with a stairway leading to the second floor. On the north side of the hall was a large room, which had been the postoffice when Shakers were here. Although the boxes had been taken out and the walls painted many times, the outlines of the boxes could still be seen. This was the girls' living room. There was a large fireplace in the north wall.

My apartment was across the hall, on the south side. I had a living room, bedroom and bath.

When I came in 1955 the girls' rooms were upstairs. One bedroom had seven beds, a smaller room two beds, and two other rooms three beds each. There was one bathroom upstairs and a powder room for the girls downstairs.

A back room downstairs, in the addition was used for storage when I came, but about 1959 or 1960 it was made into a kitchen with stove, table and cupboards, and a washer and dryer. The missionary society of the church I had attended in Walkerton, Indiana sent us money for curtains for the kitchen.

About 1960 the bedrooms upstairs were made over. The big bedroom was divided, making a small bedroom for two and one room for four or five. Clothes closets were built in each room.

A big attic had been finished, and this made a good storage space for out-of-season clothing, Christmas trimmings, and other things not in current use.

In the girls' living room downstairs there was a piano, and another in my living room. The girls practiced on their piano and also on mine. At one time I gave all the girls music lessons. We also had recitals.

Besides teaching piano, I taught the girls to clean their rooms. They made their own beds, and each girl had a special job. Some were assigned to the halls, some to the bathrooms, some to the kitchen, some to the living room. The girls' big living room floor was covered with congoletum. We went down on our hands and knees and scrubbed the floor, then waxed it. The girls even learned to buff the floors. They also learned to keep their clothes clean. We had inspection once a week.

We obtained some cotton material, and the girls learned to sew. They made gathered or pleated skirts.

I helped them to wash their hair, and sometimes washed it for them. I pinned it up, and gave some of them permanents.

Christmas was a wonderful time. The girls trimmed their own tree, with supervision.

The girls also learned to sing together. We sang for Wednesday evening prayer meetings, and also appeared in churches in the community. This gave the members of those churches some idea of what we were doing at Otterbein Home.

Out of the many gifts that were sent to Otterbein from churches all over its territory, the houseparents could choose gifts for their respective groups. I picked out things for our girls. Each houseparent wrapped the gifts for each child individually, and Santa Claus delivered them, usually on December 23rd. After that, most of the children went to their parents' or grandparents' homes for the holiday. Sometimes

people from Middletown, Dayton and other places would take some of the girls for the Christmas vacation.

We had a birthday party for each girl. They would surprise me on my birthday--or try to--if some girl didn't give it away.

Each girls received 50 cents a week allowance. On Saturday afternoon the bus would go into Lebanon. Three or four girls from our group could go, and all of them went shopping within a month.

There was a swimming pool back of old Bethany. Each group was assigned a time to go to the pool, but never on Sunday. If my girls played out at all on Sunday, it was in the backyard. Shorts were not allowed on campus.

Each month some girls were assigned to work in the dining room, or nursing care center, or to help at Old Bethany or Marble Hall.

Sunday was visiting day. As most children were from broken homes, the mothers came on the first Sunday of the month, and the fathers on the second Sunday.

After the back room was made into a kitchen, we sometimes popped corn there, or fixed a snack.

We ate all our meals in Phillippi dining room. Breakfast was at 6:15 or 6:30 a.m., as the children had to catch the school bus a little after 7 o'clock. No matter how bad the weather, we went to the dining room.

The children were to eat at least a little of whatever was served them. If a child didn't like something--like liver or fish--we allowed her to eat something else instead.

Sometimes in an emergency, such as we had ten girls in bed with measles, we fixed the foods they could eat in our Rose Cottage kitchen. We could get things we needed from our store in Phillippi basement.

One of our girls needed to learn to set a table correctly, as part of her school work. She practiced in our kitchen. We took a picture of her completed table for her school project.

We also baked cookies, sometimes, and the girls learned to serve a party.

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Mr. and Mrs. Homer (Zula) Scott came to Otterbein in 1956. Mr. Scott managed the grocery store in the basement of Phillippi. He delivered groceries to the buildings where older people lived (Good Samaritan, Bethany, Marble Hall) and to individual single family cottages. He drove a covered jeep van.

Occasionally he would take the girls from Rose Cottage for an evening ride in the van. They would sit on benches and chairs, or maybe on the floor, in the van. Their matron, Mabel Sheneman, would sit with them.

Wherever they went, Mr. Scott always made it a point to stop at an ice cream parlor or store. Each girl would be privileged to select the flavor she wanted in a cone. Sometimes there were as many as 15-20 girls. This was Mr. Scott's "treat" from his own pocket.

Mr. Scott still remembers with great amusement the time he took the girls to Dayton for ice cream. One the way home he drove into a filling station that was just opening up, before the approach had been paved. The van bogged down in the

mud. After numerous attempts to get it moving, a man standing near offered to get his chain and tractor and pull them out. That accomplished, Mr. Scott offered payment. The man refused, saying he had been in emergency situations with his own family. He had thought that Mr. Scott and the matron were parents of all those girls.

Mr. Scott was "Santa" for the girls in Rose Cottage for several years. He remembers that one year well-wishers sent in so many dolls that there would have been eight for each girl, but they shared with younger girls in the Girls' Annex.

For a time, Mr. Scott told the girls that they each could have a chocolate bar from the store before going to school. They took full advantage of this offer, and eventually Mr. Scott had to withdraw the offer, as the bill for chocolate bars, which he paid, became too large.

Mrs. Scott acted as relief parent when Mrs. Sheneman, matron of Rose Cottage, or Miss Flora Schaad, houseparent for little girls in the "Annex" had their days or weekends off. She also did some relief for the housemother of senior girls, then living in the Shaker meeting house. However, Mrs. Scott worked before her retirement, most of the time on third floor of Phillippi, where the "hospital" was located, and in the "Nursing Care Center" after the school house across the road was remodeled and became the "hospital."

Mr. and Mrs. Scott, both retired, now lived in an apartment in Bethany (1982).

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The 1947 report of the president of the Otterbein Home Auxiliary, Mrs. F.G. (Pauline) Reece, to the annual board meeting May 20, lists an interesting special project of the Auxiliary for Rose Cottage. Identical sunbonnet design applique quilts were made for the single beds by church women in the contributing area. They were so identical that they appeared to have been made by one group, instead of women of many different churches. New curtains were also furnished to blend in with the colors of the lovely new quilts.

Mrs. Reece said: "This gift of love made the girls happy and gave the governess a lot of satisfaction."

(Mrs. Reece is a resident of Bethany Hall as of 1982, having lived at Otterbein Home for several years.)

Rose Cottage, the structure, ceased to exist in January-February 1982 when it was razed by Otterbein Home. Confirmation of the date of erection was found in the date 1811 above the front door, in unmistakable Shaker style figures.

Some of the bricks, which were very soft, and inclined to crumble, were kept as souvenirs by older residents and employees of Otterbein Home.

Time marches on, and in a few years there will be no one living at Otterbein Home who will have first-hand memory of the life and times of Rose Cottage.

